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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAMAKO 000256

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ML](#)

SUBJECT: BAHANGA RELEASES PRISONERS AFTER QUIET NEGOTIATIONS

REF: A. BAMAKO 00957

[1](#)B. 06 BAMAKO 00208

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(C) The leader of the Mali-Niger Tuareg Alliance (MNTA) Ibrahim ag Bahanga released his 22 remaining hostages on March 8 in return for perhaps as much as 5 million Euros from the Libyan government. While the quantity of the supposed payout was derived from a single Embassy source and remains uncorroborated a March 8 official communique from the Malian Presidency recognized Libyan President Qadhafi "for brotherly actions that significantly contributed to ending this crisis." Seven of the 22 hostages were liberated in Kidal. The remaining fifteen hostages were released in Tripoli. The MNTA apparently transported the hostages from Tinzawaten in northern Mali, where they were captured in August 2007 (Ref A), by road. They were scheduled to return by air to Gao, Mali, on March 10. President Amadou Toumani Toure has reportedly already traveled to Gao to welcome their arrival.

2.(C) Last week Iyad ag Ghali, the leader of the Tuareg rebel Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC), and the Libyan Consul General in Bamako, Moussa Koni, met with Bahanga in Tinzawaten. Koni presided over Libya's short-lived and highly controversial consulate in Kidal in early 2006 (Ref B). Although we have yet to corroborate the terms of the agreement with Bahanga, one Embassy contact reported that ag Ghali and Koni passed approximately 5 million Euros to Bahanga.

3.(C) The ag Ghali - Koni - Bahanga meeting was notable because it involved only these three individuals operating in relative silence. Previous negotiation teams have involved many more Tuareg leaders. Following ag Ghali and Koni's meeting with Bahanga, a larger and more public delegation of Tuareg leaders traveled from Kidal to meet with Bahanga, apparently to provide a semblance of cover for the real negotiating team that consisted of ag Ghali and Koni.

4.(C) The second delegation also contained no notable leaders from the Kidal Ifoghas tribe - a point that reinforces the suspicion that the real deal was concluded by ag Ghali and Koni. Contacts in northern Mali report that President Amadou Toumani Toure charged the Governor of Kidal, Al Hamdou ag Illyen, and Mohamed ag Erlaf, to arrange the second delegation of Tuaregs after ag Ghali and Koni finished their discussions with Bahanga. The second delegation included the following individuals:

- Ghousmane ag Ahmed, a less well known Iforas from the Kel Taghilit fraction
- Zeid ag Hamzata, a Taghat Melet leader, Kel Telabit fraction
- Abdoussalam ag Assalat, another Taghat Melet, Kel

Telabit fraction, ADC member, president of the Kidal Chamber of Commerce

-- Meti ag Mohamed Rhissa, a Taghat Melet, Kel Telabit fraction, a customs officer in Segou

-- Attaher ag Inguida, Taghat Melet, from the Kel Oukenek fraction, local Chief in Edjerer

-- Choghib ag Attaher, an Idnane from the Talkast fraction, Chief in Eghacher-Sadiden

-- Mohamad ag Erlaf, an Idnane from the Talkast fraction, Director of Malian Agency for Local Investment (ANICT)

-- Eghless ag Foni, an Idnane from the Talkast fraction, former Governor of Kidal, now retired

-- Baba Ould Sidi Elmoghtar, local Chief of Kounta Arabs in Kidal region

-- Abanassa ag Saghid, an Imghad fraction Chief in Kidal

-- Iswaden ag Saghid, an Imghad from Kidal, formerly employed at Kidal Governor's office

-- Ghissa ag Ghatbo, former mayoral candidate from Kidal, belongs to a sub-fraction of the Ifoghas/Kel Telabit

-- Ahmouden ag Ikmas, an Imghad working at Kidal Governor's office

5.(C) COMMENT. Hopefully this will defuse, at least in the short term, the current round of instability in northern Mali and re-focus the spotlight on the implementation of the Algiers Accords. Such a large payout to Bahanga, however, could encourage other actors - provided the payoff actually occurred - to engage in similar activities. The payout to Bahanga and implication of Libya may also irritate Algeria. While many in Mali blame the Algerians for aiding and encouraging Bahanga, Algeria has consistently presented itself as the viable negotiator for northern Mali. By securing the release of the hostages, Libya may have once again bought itself a place at northern Mali's roundtable.

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